



# IN NORTHERN SKIES

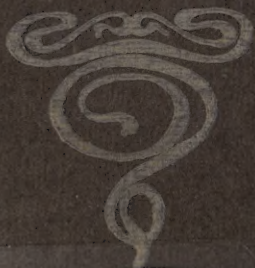
AND OTHER POEMS

*by*

**SERANUS**

(MRS. J. W. F. HARRISON)

By Mrs. Frances Harrison



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AND OTHER POEMS

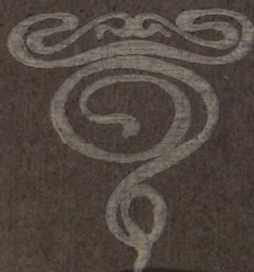
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**SERANUS**

(MRS. J. W. F. HARRISON)

[Marie Frances Harrison]







## IN NORTHERN SKIES



Webbs of silver, spun in the twilight's travail,  
Spring into sight when the orange rim has passed;  
Silver webs that a diamond dew-world spangles,  
Webbs of crystal glittering at glowing angles  
Flash into flame at the zenith, rosily massed ;

Crowns of silver, colossal, jewelled, mighty,  
Serenely set upon brows straight, bright, and  
bland ;  
Girdles that grace a priestess high in the azure,  
Zones that encircle a queen in her safe embrasure,  
Shine on the verge of midnight's velvet strand ;

Shields of silver, studded with fires of topaz,  
Harps that are silver-strung, rimmed pale with  
pearls ;  
Rapiers rich with gems that the gloom encrusteth,  
Scythes and scabbards that never a wet moon  
rusteth,  
Wheels of gold that a tireless helmsman twirls ;

Sails of silver, spread to the spacious ether,  
Ships of state that ride with a burnished keel ;  
Galleys tall that float to a magic measure,  
Dipping divinely down in a radiant pleasure,  
Hulls of gold that round with the star-worlds  
wheel—

All go by—sails, shields, crowns, gems and girdles.  
Hearken the ring of the mighty silvern chains !  
Hearken the clang and the clash, the reverberations,  
The golden din, as the gleaming constellations  
Slowly swing and sink to the dusky plains !

## IN MARCH



Here on the wide waste lands,  
Take—child—these trembling hands,  
Though my life be as blank and waste,  
My days as surely ungraced  
By glimmer of green on the rim  
Of a sunless wilderness dim,  
As the wet fields barren and brown,  
As the fork of each sterile limb  
Shorn of its lustrous crown.

See—how vacant and flat  
The landscape—empty and dull,  
Scared by an ominous lull  
Into a trance—we have sat  
This hour on the edge of a broken, a gray snake-  
fence,  
And nothing that lives has flown,  
Or crept, or leapt, or been blown  
To our feet or past our faces—  
So desolate, child—the place is !  
It strikes, does it not, a chill,  
Like that other upon the hill,  
We felt one bleak October ?  
See—the gray wood still sober  
'Ere it be wild with glee,  
With growth, with an ecstasy  
Of fruition born of desire.  
The marigold's yellow fire  
Doth not yet in the sun burn to leap, to aspire ;  
Its myriad spotted spears  
No erythronium rears ;

We cannot see  
Anemone,  
Or heart-lobed brown hepatica ;  
There doth not fly,  
Low under sky,  
One kingfisher—dipping and darting  
From reedy shallows where reds are starting,  
Pale pink tips that shall burst into bloom,  
Not in one night's mid-April gloom,  
But inch by inch, till ripening tint,  
And feathery plume and emerald glint  
Proclaim the waters are open.

All this will come,  
The panting hum  
Of the life that will stir,  
Glance and glide, and whistle and whir,  
Chatter and crow, and perch and pry,  
Crawl and leap and dart and fly,  
Things of feather and things of fur,  
Under the blue of an April sky.  
Shall speak, the dumb,  
Shall leap, the numb,  
All this will come,  
It never misses,  
Failure, yet—  
Never was set  
In the sure spring's calendar,  
Wherefore—Pet—  
Give me one of your springtime kisses !  
While you plant some hope in my cold man's breast—  
Ah ! How welcome the strange flower-guest—  
Water it softly with maiden tears,  
Go to it early—and late—with fears ;

Guard it, and watch it, and give it time  
For the holy dew to moisten the rime—  
Make of it some green gracious thing,  
Such as the Heavens shall make of the Spring !

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The trees and the houses are darkling,  
No lamps yet are sparkling  
    Along the ravine ;  
A wild wind rises, the waters are fretting,  
    No moon nor star in the sky can be seen.

But if I can bring her with thinking  
The thoughts that are linking  
    Her life unto mine :  
Then blow, wild wind ! And chafe, proud river !  
    At least a Star in my heart shall shine.

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Had I not met her, great had been my loss,  
    Had I not loved her, pain I had been spared.  
So this life goes, and lovers bear the cross,  
    Burden borne willingly, if only it be shared.

Had I not met her, Song had passed me by,  
    Had I not loved her, Fame had been more sure.  
So this life goes, we laugh, and then we sigh,  
    While we believe 'tis blessed to endure.



## IN APRIL



There is so much that I would say,  
When I am walking here alone,  
Walking alone this April day.  
There is so much that I should fear  
Anyone else should ever hear,  
So much that is meant for his own ear.  
The ways are dry in the woods,  
And the buds are red on the tree—  
I should like to bring him now,  
And I could, for I well know how.  
But could I ever atone  
To my weak, rash self if I stirred  
A finger to bring him nearer,  
Or showed to himself he was dearer  
Than anything—all beside?  
By something I am deterred.  
But hard, in this beautiful weather,  
Not to enjoy it together!  
Hard, to stand by the gate,  
With that sense of a dead, dull weight  
Pressing upon the heart,  
Settled above the brows,  
The sense of a sad frustration  
That no hope of a meeting allows.  
What use in the rest of things  
If we are not together?  
What goodness or glory brings  
The wonderful April weather  
While friends like us walk apart?

Even to-day 'tis too late,  
For some of the flowers we prize

Are over, their petals shaken  
To earth, and their places taken  
By later and hardier ones.  
The bloodroot buds awaken,  
First of the blossoms pure,  
And after the warmer suns  
Have shone for a day or two  
On the ivory immature  
Of crumpled petal and plume,  
There steals on the air the perfume  
Of the sweet arbutus, tinged  
With the faintest of rose. Star-fringed  
Will the edge of the wood soon be  
Where the clustered anemone  
Make of earth a milky way.  
The delicate star-flower, too, will be seen  
Set in its whorl of pallid green,  
And tall splashed trilliums, mauve and pink,  
Green and purple, striped and gay,  
With here and there  
A specimen rare  
Of deepest puce, with a heart of ink ;  
And up in your path,  
With that way it hath  
Of flaunting, sudden, in empty air,  
The aquilegia's jester's frock  
Will gaily flare.  
At the side of a rock  
You frequently meet his red and yellow ;  
He is the wit for all the wood,  
Known by his color and pointed hood.

Already the beauty of noon has passed,  
As I stand by the gate  
And moodily wait

For a face, or a sign,  
I dimly divine  
A change in the air,  
A chill, a despair,  
That is foreign to Hope,  
To shimmering green  
On the wooded slope  
Of the rushing river.  
No one will come, though I wait all day.  
Go in—go back—what use to stay?

NOTE.—IN MARCH. The late Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman wrote of this poem to the author: "I greatly regret that your beautiful lines, "In March," have reached me too late to be included with other extracts from your work in my "Victorian Anthology." I regret this the more that the personal note would have brought new life into the Canadian section. As it is, I am greatly pleased with the variant that your poetry makes in the space allotted to Canada."

The lines originally appeared in *The Week*, and were entitled "Fleming" (a fragment) with the sub-title "March."



## PROPHET



I am not yet so very old,  
Yet hidden things can I descry,  
And mysteries can I unfold.

And curious things can I foretell,  
And the Lord's purposes read as well.  
Yet you shall not find me bowed,  
Nor perceive me with a flowing beard.  
Nor find in me eyes that are study-bleared.  
I should say that in a crowd  
I must look like all the others,  
Which suits me best, for it is the test  
That, learned or dull, we are all brothers.

Many kinds of lore there are,  
And I know little of moon or star,  
Beyond that moons are round and bright,  
And stars are points of silver light ;  
But to me the astronomer  
Is not more wise than the carpenter.

Many books are there left to read,  
And sometimes a book is a friend in need,  
But although the poet may work in his way,  
The way of his work is not the only way.  
He rhymes in fourteen, or in six, or in eight,  
Or not at all, in epics of state ;  
The sailor on the wide grey seas  
Tries in his way his Lord to please.

Though he would prove but a raw empiric,  
Bearing a hand with lay or lyric,  
He can tie over twenty different knots,  
And at last he quietly rots  
In the brine below, as the poet in earth,  
What difference then in death, at birth ?

Many trades and arts there be under the sky.  
I have seen the wheels move, the sparks fly.  
I have watched the large ships climb the locks,  
And watched them unloading along the docks.  
Strife have I seen, and nearly a battle,  
Bitter talk have I heard and cruel tattle ;  
Of good I've known much, yet more of evil,  
And always together—in flour, the weevil ;  
Under the rose-leaf, coiled and snug,  
Sleeps the green horned slug.

Many times have I thought that the race of men  
Must come to the first of things again ;  
The gazer at stars be forced to measure  
Planks—not worlds and planets—at leisure.  
The poet who writes beneath garden trees  
Be sent to roam the wide grey seas,  
Growing a proper sailor man,  
Hairy-chested and strong and calm,  
For inky finger a horny palm.

Many trades, many arts there surely be.  
The worst of it is—only one for me !  
As long as there's anything left to say,  
Prophet I am and must be alway.  
Still I think if I knew how chairs were made,  
Or if I had strength for trowel or spade,  
Or the wit to fashion straws into braid,

I would not be Prophet for long.  
Prophecy, fancy, prayer, song,  
These are not the delights of our age.

So I wonder if when the race of men  
Comes to the first of things again  
I shall be Prophet still by choice !  
Thus, to that end, I will keep my voice  
In practice. Lord, but touch my lip,  
So that Thy teaching may not slip !  
So will I serve in my Oracle-shop  
Until Thou bidst mine arm to drop.

NOTE — Lucette. This is the 45th Villanelle written quite recently by the author, who included 44 in "Pine, Rose and Fleur de Lis." Mr. Stedman wrote of these: "As to the remarkably picturesque series, "Down the River," it is a novelty, indeed, to find the French form so spontaneously mastered and put to an absolutely fresh use."

I desire to thank the editors of periodicals at home and abroad for permission to reprint "In Northern Skies," "At Valois" and "Prophet."

NOTE.—Eadwine the King. The story of the conversion of the King of Northumbria has occupied many pens, but the suggestions for the present poem are to be mainly found in Green's History of the English People. The well-known incident of Coifi, the Priest, hurling his spear at the altar of Godmanham, might have followed upon some such scene as the one treated by the author.



## ORION



Spanning the winter heaven, a slanting tower  
Of strength, with pose defiant, his panoply  
Flashes ; the glittering hilt, the belt of three  
Bright stars gleam out to comfort the dogs that cower  
Mute, wistful, ever-ready, till the hour  
Of dumb probation pass and they are free  
To rise and follow in joyous mutiny  
The master, upon whose feet their kisses shower.

Forever striding towards a distant goal,  
Forever travelling within a mighty ring,  
Set in the awful solitudes that cling  
Around his giant frame—this fearless soul,  
Remembering that Beginning which he saw,  
Holds not one doubt of Everlasting Law.

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## THE MARSHES



In mist-draped pools, lagoons of dull dark green,  
A league along the broad lakeshore they wind.  
Gray skies at morn and blue at noon but find  
And leave them dim and dank, the fit demesne  
Of writhing things and creeping, dismal grave  
Of crimes unknown, where knotted ends of rope  
Twist, tangle around the slimy roots that grope  
For fresher air unwashed by a fetid wave.

Yet out upon these marshes there is glow,  
Radiance illimitable, when the crest  
Of distant hills is outlined black below  
The broken splendours of the burning West.  
Then, each tall rush becomes an argent spire,  
Then, the dim pools are flooded red with fire.

## AT VALOIS



Long leafy headlands stretch into the green  
Of mighty Saint Laurent, while on the mead,  
Dark Ottawa's tawny waters rush and recede ;  
Dorval floats, shimmering ; turbulent Lachine  
Sparkles in dipping silver crests between  
Rich shores of elm, fringed with glistening reed ;  
That dim red web is the bridge ; around us speed  
The brown canoes, for sunset port grown keen.

Ah ! It is summer sweet ; it is fair, it is fair !  
That tapering spire to the right is little Pointe Claire.  
Afar in the sun-flushed fields a woman stands  
Motionless, resting, behind her antique plough,  
Shading from too much glare a beautiful brow  
With sunburnt, resolute, hard and horny hands.

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## THAW



Shower-spotted panes that let in too much light,  
A dull white glare, lasting the livelong day.  
The roof drips and the trees ; off soaking clay  
The snow slides stealthily, or drops at night,  
Loosened by rain, with sudden thuds that fright  
The watch-dog wearying in enforced sleep  
For play with children who at home must keep.  
Silently steals over house and lawn a blight  
Welcomed by only one within my ken,  
The quick red squirrel of the neighbouring glen.  
With keen eye glancing sharp in hungry mood  
He quits the tree, drops swiftly to the ground,  
And finding the precious morsels that abound,  
Praises the weather that has brought him—food.

## LUCETTE



I seem to see you still, Lucette,  
Down in the Vale of the Richelieu,  
'Tis fifteen years since last we met.

2. Dark red skirt and apron blue,  
1. Little gold cross and chain of jet—  
I seem to see you still, Lucette ;

A little taller, paler, yet  
Still but a girl, and merry, too.  
'Tis fifteen years since last we met

And I must not, my friend, forget  
The change Time may have made in you.  
I seem to see you—still, Lucette,

Wearing that little amulet,  
“*Marie, secours ! Priez pour nous !*”  
'Tis fifteen years since last we met.

Heaven grant no grief, no wild regret  
Have reached you since we said “*Adieu,*”  
I seem to see you still, Lucette,  
'Tis fifteen years since last we met !



## EADWINE THE KING



Eadwine the King,  
King of Northumbria,  
He the wise overlord,  
Lord over all,  
Sat once at meat  
In his fire-lighted hall.

Bravely the logs burned,  
Brightly the flames danced,  
Flickered and wavered  
High on the wall.  
Ruddy the meat showed  
Red in the fire-glare ;  
Broad were the platters piled  
Brown with the venison,  
Capon and hare ;  
Deep were the cups of brass  
Filled to the brim,  
Round and well hollowed out,  
Frothed at the rim,  
Waiting for warriors  
High to uplift them,  
Singing their war-songs,  
Shouting their battle-hymn.

Thus in the firelight,  
Waiting for torches,  
Sat the great overlord,  
King of Northumbria,  
Eadwine the King.  
Through his tired brain  
Weary thoughts fluttered,

Heavy his heart was  
With troubles unuttered,  
Set down untasted,  
The beaker of brass ;  
Grown cold and wasted,  
The food on the platter.  
So in the red light  
Sat the great lord,  
Sickened with slaughter,  
Weary of warfare,  
Tired of the sword.

Heavy his heart was,  
Troubled his life,  
For once more at Eastre  
News from the outworld  
Reached him of strife,  
Of pillage and plunder,  
Murmurs and moanings,  
Doubts of the High Gods,  
Gods of the Thunder,  
Woden and Thor.  
Merged with his dreaming,  
Troubling his mind,  
Tales of the "white bread,"  
Tales of a White Christ  
Martyred and innocent,  
Gentle and kind.

Should he believe them,  
Should he accept Him,  
What would he gain ?  
Feared he the quick knife,  
Feared he the death-stroke,

Should he disdain  
The Gods of the people,  
Woden and Thor.

Thus while the red light  
Flickered and wavered,  
Entered the warriors  
Bearing the torches,  
Shouting and singing,  
Ripe for the feast ;  
Entered the King's friend,  
Coifi, the priest.  
Then as a silence  
Fell like a pall,  
Eadwine the King  
Strode down the length of his fire-  
lighted hall.

“ Men of Northumbria,  
Bidden to feast,  
Ealdormen, warriors,  
Coifi—my priest,  
Well have you followed me,  
Well have you served me,  
Hurling the sharp spear,  
Flashing the broad blade  
High in the air.  
For this I thank you,  
Helped you the High Gods ?  
Here do I swear,  
I—your true Lord,  
Sickened with slaughter,  
Tired of the sword,—  
Never again to your Gods will I pray.  
Have we not followed them ?

Have we not served them ?  
What have they brought  
But warfare and weeping,  
Murmurs and moanings,  
Pillage and plunder,  
These Gods of the thunder,  
Woden and Thor !  
So—from to-day,  
Eating the “white bread,”  
Taking the White Christ,  
Lo—I have done  
With praying to false Gods,  
Woden and Thunder !  
Gods of the people,  
Of murder and plunder !“

Steady the King stood,  
Lifting his right hand,  
Facing the war-band,  
Fronting the warriors  
Baulked of their feast,  
When from his place rose  
Coifi, the priest.

“ Well have you spoken,  
Eadwine our King.  
I, too, am weary,  
Weary of smiting,  
Sickened with fighting.  
Give us the “white bread,”  
Give us the White Christ,  
Gentle and kind.  
Too long have these false Gods  
Troubled my mind.”



But ere the tumult  
Brooded and broke,  
Flashed through the air  
A traitor stroke.  
Eumer, the envoy,  
He, the wild Wessexborn,  
He, the base Saxon,  
Drew forth the quick knife,  
Rushed on the King.  
Out crashed the tumult then,  
Up rose the warriors,  
Brandishing torches,  
While with a spring  
Ere the quick death-stroke  
Took the King's life,  
Lilla, the churl,  
One of the war-band,  
Fell on the knife,  
Staggered and sank,  
Died, for his King.

Bravely the logs burned,  
Brightly the flames danced  
High on the wall.  
Lilla, the churl,  
Lay on the floor of the fire-lighted hall.  
Knelt by his bosom,  
Coifi, the priest ;  
Silent, the warriors  
Turned from the feast,  
Gazing at Eumer,  
He, the base traitor,  
Closing upon him,  
Burning to slay him,

Breathing out vengeance,  
Eager for slaughter.

Wounded, the King stood,  
Trembling a little,  
Lifting his left hand,  
Keeping his right hand  
Hid in his breast.

“Pagan or Christian,  
Woden or Christ,  
Love for our brother,  
That is the test.  
That hath sufficed.  
See—how he lies there,  
Nought more to give ;  
Felt he the death-stroke,  
Took he the home-thrust  
That I might live.  
Therefore I honour him,  
Therefore I love him,  
Trusting to meet him,  
Hoping to thank him,  
In the far soul-world,  
In our Christ’s heaven.

‘But for this other—  
He, the base traitor—  
What must I say ?  
He is my enemy,  
Me would he slay.  
Yet hath Christ taught me,  
He, too, is my brother,  
Though he would slay me,  
Bind and betray me.  
See—how the red blood  
Drips from my right hand !

Yet—it is nothing.  
Lo—I command you,  
You, my true warriors,  
Men of Northumbria,  
Coifi, my priest,  
For the dear Christ's sake  
Him must ye spare ;  
Let him pass scathless,  
Let him go forth now,  
Free—as the air.”  
Then the great King dropped—  
Faint, in his chair.

Eumer, the envoy,  
Heard and recoiled,  
Looking around,  
Saw the tall warriors  
Sheathing their spears.  
Saw the pale corse  
Clay-cold on the ground ;  
Saw the King's face  
White, like the Christ's,  
Saw—through his tears—  
Tears of contrition,  
Tears of remorse,  
For the wild action,  
For the great sin.  
Hiding his face,  
Creeping abjectly,  
So he fared forth  
From the King's presence,  
Eadwine the King,  
He the great overlord,  
Lord over all,  
Sitting at meat  
In his fire-lighted hall.





